

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ASUNCI 00291 01 OF 02 202340Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 HA-05 TRSE-00 MCT-01 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04
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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2086

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ASUNCION 0291

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PA
SUBJ: NEW HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS - UNANSWERED QUESTIONS MOUNT

REF: ASUNCION 162 ASUNCION 217 ASUNCION 226 ASUNCION 0281

SUMMARY. THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" AND YPACARAI PLOTS APPEAR TO BE INVENTIONS OF INVESTIGATIONS CHIEF PASTOR CORONEL TO CREATE ILLUSION OF TERRORIST THREAT HERE. MOTIVES STILL UNCLEAR; PRESIDENT STROESSNER DOES NOT SEEM TO BE TAKING A HAND AND IS BEING CRITICIZED FOR THIS, EVEN BY SOME OF THE MILITARY. ASUNCION BEING TREATED TO SPECTACLE OF LABOR MINISTER PUBLICLY AVOWING INNOCENCE OF JAILED LABOR LEADERS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY INTERIOR MINISTER MONTANARO AND CORONEL SEEK TO LINK THE TWO CASES TO THE OPM. WE HAVE IDENTIFIED MANY INCONSISTENCIES IN THE LATTERS' CLAIMS. AS IN THE BOGADO GONDRA CASE, IT ALMOST SEEMS AS THOUGH MONTANARO IS BEING SET UP TO TAKE THE BLAME FOR CORONEL'S ACTIONS SHOULD THIS LATER BE NECESSARY. MOST OF INFORMED ASUNCION SHARES OUR SKEPTICISM AND PUZZLEMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY LIKELY THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" PLOT SUPPOSEDLY UNCOVERED BY INVESTIGATIONS POLICE IS WHAT SOME OF OUR OFFICIAL CONTACTS THEMSELVES ARE NOW CALLING A "BLUFF".

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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 00291 01 OF 02 202340Z

2. THESE OFFICIAL CONTACTS ARE SPECULATING ABOUT THE MOTIVES OF INVESTIGATION POLICE CHIEF PASTOR CORONEL FOR KEEPING THE HUMAN RIGHTS POT BUBBLING. THEIR COMMENTS ARE IN SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE ARRESTED LABOR LEADERS FROM YPACARAI, THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" INCIDENT, AND THE BOGADO GONDRA CASE OF LAST JULY.

3. ACCORDING TO ONE RELIABLE SOURCE, EVEN GENERAL ANDRES RODRIGUEZ OF THE POWERFUL FIRST CAVALRY DIVISION HAS EXPRESSED DISBELIEF REGARDING PASTOR CORONEL'S "DISCOVERIES", AND OTHER MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICERS ARE SAID TO BE PUZZLED OVER WHY STROESSNER IS ALLOWING THESE FREE WHEELING ACTIVITIES TO CONTINUE.

4. THE LATEST INDICATIONS THAT STROESSNER IS NOT HIMSELF TAKING A DIRECT HAND OR GIVING HIS SUBORDINATES CLEAR SIGNALS ARE THE CONTRASTING PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND GENERAL POSTURE OF LABOR MINISTER GONZALEZ, REGARDING THE INNOCENCE OF THE YPACARAI LABOR LEADERS WHO HAVE BEEN IN DETENTION FOR OVER A MONTH, VERSUS THOSE OF INTERIOR MINISTER MONTANARO AND INVESTIGATIONS CHIEF PASTOR CORONEL. THESE LATTER TWO MET WITH COLORADO PARTY WARD CHIEFS IN ASUNCION ON JANUARY 18. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS PASTOR CORONEL DISPLAYED ARMS AND MATERIALS ALLEGEDLY CAPTURED FROM THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" GROUP AND REITERATED THAT THE YPACARAI LABOR LEADERS HAD BEEN ENGAGED IN SUBVERSIVE PLOTTING (SEPTEL). MONTANARO PROPOSED INTER ALIA THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF AN "URBAN GUARD" MADE UP OF COLORADO PARTISANS "TO PUT AN END TO SUBVERSIVE ATTEMPTS OF THE (PRIMERO DE MARZO) TYPE." THE WARD CHIEFS REPORTEDLY PROMISED TO BECOME "SENTINELS" TO HELP THE SECURITY FORCES MAINTAIN THE PEACE.

5. OUR OWN CHECKLIST OF SUSPICIOUS ELEMENTS IN THE "PRIMERO DE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ASUNCI 00291 01 OF 02 202340Z

MARZO" STORY IS AS FOLLOWS:

A. UNLIKE PREVIOUS INCIDENTS, THERE WERE NO IMMEDIATE, INDEPENDENT REPORTS OF ANY TROUBLE FOLLOWING THE ALLEGED SHOOTOUT, EXPLOSION, AND THE WOUNDING OF THREE POLICEMEN ON JANUARY 12. THE DETAILS EMERGED ONLY AFTER A FULL DAY HAD GONE BY, AND CAME EXCLUSIVELY FROM OFFICIAL SOURCES, NOT INDEPENDENTLY CONFIRMED. (IN CONTRAST, THE APRIL 1976 SHOOTOUT WAS CONFIRMED BY A PLETHORA OF SOURCES, SOME EYEWITNESS, ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.)

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 00291 02 OF 02 202341Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ASUNCION 0291

B. THERE ARE CONFLICTING REPORTS FROM OTHERWISE RELIABLE SOURCES AS TO WHETHER THE MAN WHO ALLEGEDLY WAS KILLED IN THE SHOOTOUT (ZAVALA ESQUIVEL) LIVED IN THE HOUSE WHERE THE INCIDENT TOOK PLACE. NEIGHBORS, HOWEVER, REPORT THAT PERSONS UNKNOWN TO THEM WERE SEEN BRINGING A LARGE TRUNK INTO THE DWELLING JUST BEFORE THE SMALL EXPLOSION WAS HEARD; NO POLICE WERE PRESENT IN THE HOUSE WHEN THE TRUNK BLEW UP; AND NO CASUALTIES WERE REMOVED FROM THE SCENE.

C. WE HAVE AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT ZAVALA'S BODY WAS SEEN AT THE ASUNCION POLICE CLINIC A DAY BEFORE HE ALLEGEDLY WAS KILLED. (ASUNCION 266).

D. THERE ARE SOME PECULIARITIES IN THE POLICE'S "MOST WANTED LISTS", AND AMONG THOSE WHOM THE POLICE SAY THEY ARE TRYING TO LOCATE IN CONNECTION WITH THE INCIDENT. SOME NAMES BELONG TO PERSONS WHO HAVE BEEN MISSING SINCE THE APRIL 1976 INCIDENT; SOME ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE KNOWN TO HAVE HAD NO POLITICAL CONNECTION AT ALL, BUT ARE RELATED TO OR ACQUAINTANCES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, PROMINENT OPPOSITIONISTS, OR DISSIDENT COLORADOS. SOME ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN ABSENT FROM THE COUNTRY FOR SEVERAL YEARS. SOME ARE ENTIRELY UNKNOWN TO US, AND IN SEEKING AN EXPLANATION FROM OFFICIAL SOURCES WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN UNCONVINCING EXPLANATIONS AS TO WHY THEIR NAMES WERE NOT PREVIOUSLY ON ANY OF THE LISTS OF SUBVERSIVES ROUTINELY FURNISHED TO US.

E. ONE OF THE "MOST WANTED" IS MIRTHA ELENA AYALA FERREIRA
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 00291 02 OF 02 202341Z

DE ARZA, WHO UNTIL THE JANUARY 12 EVENT WAS A REPORTER FOR "LA TRIBUNA", THE ASUNCION DAILY WHICH CEASED PUBLICATION IN DECEMBER. MRS. DE ARZA IS WELL KNOWN TO US. SHE IN FACT INTERVIEWED AMBASSADOR WHITE ON HIS ARRIVAL, AND HER DIRECT QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS APPEARED TO IRRITATE THE OFFICIAL WELCOMING COMMITTEE. SHE WAS GRANTED ASYLUM IN THE MEXICAN EMBASSY ON JANUARY 18.

F. THE CAVALIER TREATMENT OF FORMER DETAINEES (E.G., DIONISIO BORDA, SEE ASUNCION 226) STRONGLY SUGGESTS A LACK OF SERIOUS PURPOSE ON THE PART OF THE POLICE.

G. THE REMOVAL OF FIVE PRISONERS FROM EMBOSCADA JUST BEFORE THE JANUARY 12 EVENT HAS NOT BEEN EXPLAINED. (THE NUMBER-TWO MAN OF THE BOGADO GONDRA GROUP, JORGE CANESE, WAS TRANS-

REFERRED TO A DOWNTOWN POLICE STATION ON DECEMBER 23, GIVING RISE TO FEAR WITHIN HIS FAMILY THAT PASTOR CORONEL MIGHT BE PLANNING SOMEHOW TO "USE" HIM IN CONNECTION WITH THE YPACARAI INCIDENT.) H. THE HAPHAZARD EFFORTS BY PASTOR CORONEL TO LINK THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" GROUP TO THE YPACARAI WORKERS SO FAR HAS BEEN CLUMSY AND TOTALLY UNCONVINCING.

6. THE OVERALL IMPRESSION IS ONE OF LACK OF COHESION OR DIRECTION, OR PURPOSE. TO SPEAK OF A GOP POLICY OR OFFICIAL INTENTIONS IN THE CURRENT CONFUSED SITUATION IS IMPRECISE AND MISLEADING. STROESSNER IN THE PAST HAS OFTEN TAKEN A HANDS-OFF ATTITUDE IN SUCH MATTERS, LETTING HIS UNDERLINGS CLEAN UP THEIR OWN MESSSES. HE DID INSTRUCT MONTANARO TO TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BOGADO GONDRA CASE LAST JULY, AND IT SEEMS LIKELY MONTANARO WOULD NOT HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO COLLABORATE WITH HIS ARCH-ENEMY PASTOR CORONEL IN MEETING WITH THE WARD LEADERS ON THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" CASE EXCEPT UNDER INSTRUCTIONS. THE THEORY HELD BY CERTAIN OPPOSITIONISTS THAT SOME SORT OF AN INTERNECINE STRUGGLE AMONG STROESSNER'S SUBORDINATES IS UNDERWAY MAY HAVE SOME MERIT. TWICE NOW (IN THE BOGADO
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PAGE 03 ASUNCI 00291 02 OF 02 202341Z

GONDRA CASE AND WITH THE YPACARAI/PRIMERO DE MARZO CASE) MONTANARO HAS HAD TO TAKE THE LIMELIGHT AGAINST HIS WILL. WE HEAR HE IS TRYING TO GET OUT OF HOLDING THE PRESS CONFERENCE ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 16 BUT NOW POSTPONED. NONE OF THIS ACCORDS WITH THE GENERALLY POSITIVE ROLE THIS MAN HAS LATELY PLAYED IN HUMAN RIGHTS CASES, HIS CAUTIOUS SUPPORT FOR A VISIT BY THE IAHRIC, OR HIS EFFORTS IN SECURING THE RELEASE OF SOME FIFTY POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RECENT MONTHS.

8. FOR THE PRESENT, WE REITERATE OUR SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE DISCOVERY OF ANY NEW SUBVERSIVE PLOTS, A SKEPTICISM APPARENTLY WIDELY SHARED BY MANY PEOPLE BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT.
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